Buddhist & Pali College of Singapore Alumni (BPCA) - Quarterly E-Bulletin

Oct - Dec 2024

Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

October to December saw BPC students preparing and taking the examinations. We also welcomed the new batch of 2023/2024 Diploma students who also had their orientation on 8 or 10 October 2023 and a Temple Tour on 26 November 2023. This issue of the e-Bulletin brings you a glimpse of their learning and bonding through the Temple Tour.

From 15 December to 26 December, 34 alumni members and their family members/friends, together with Bhante Cakkapala, Bhante Sirisumana and Bhante Suneetha, went on the Incredible India Pilgrimage, organised by the Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore Alumni Committee. Besides visiting some significant places outside of the usual itinerary, there were Dhamma Talks by Bhante Cakkapala and carefully selected sutta chanting associated with the site visits. Many remarked that the pilgrimage was a perfect milestone following the examinations, not just as a consolidation of what was learnt, but also an excellent opportunity to further bond with their *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* and alumni members of different batches. Many were inspired to continue their academic and spiritual pursuits. As there are different aspects to this pilgrimage that we would like to share with you, included in this e-bulletin is Part 1 of a 3-part series. Look out for a special Incredible India Pilgrimage Edition subsequently.

As a tradition, we would like to invite the current BPC teachers and students for the Lunar New Year Bonding on 18 February 2024. Join us too, for the first monthly Mindfulness Walk on 25 February 2024 (open to current BPC teachers and students for now). Read on for more details.

Lastly, you are most welcome to contribute an article to the e-Bulletin or recommend your BPC alumni friend who may have something to share. Just drop Sister Tyy Yn an email at tyyynquek@gmail.com.

May all be well, happy and peaceful!

The Editorial Team

Highlights of Oct – Dec 2023

8 & 10 Oct

Orientation for 2023/24 Diploma Classes

21 - 23 Oct

2022/23 Diploma Classes Exams

1 - 12 Dec

Degree Levels and MA Exams

Photos credit: Sis Sandra Koh

26 Nov

Temple Tour for 2023/24 Diploma Classes: *See pages 4 to 9.*

15 - 26 Dec

The Incredible India Pilgrimage: *See pages 10 to 37.*

17 Dec

Temple Tour

By Brother Dave Ng 26 Nov 2023

The temple tour was organised by the Buddhist and Pali College of Singapore Alumni Committee for the 2023/2024 Diploma classes, comprising students from both Mangala Vihara (Buddhist Temple) and Poh Ming Tse Temple, to better understand the practices of the three Buddhist traditions.

After registering our attendance, we were separated into 4 groups randomly within the cohort where a group assignment was provided for each of the 3 locations that we were visiting. It was a great initiative as it helped us to know each other better. We embarked on our journey in the bus where Brother Jebsons briefed us on the locations of the temples that we will be visiting.

Our first stop was the **Lian Shan Shuang Lin Monastery** which is also the oldest Mahayana monastery in Singapore located in Toa Payoh. The temple guide did a fantastic job describing every detail of the temple to us while walking us through various parts of the temple.

One of the key highlights of the temple is the Mahāvira Hall, which is the main hall of the monastery. In the centre, we saw our Śākyamuni Buddha. We also saw two other buddhas unique to the Mahāyāna tradition.

Editor's note: In the photo, from left to right: Amitabha Buddha, Ven Ānanda, Śākyamuni Buddha, Ven Mahakasyapa and Medicine Buddha

Next, we also visited the Guan Yin Dian where the popular form of the Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva is housed. We had the opportunity to circumambulate three times around the statue to be blessed with good health and a peace of mind.

We were very thankful to be given the opportunity to do the circumambulation around the Bodhisattva as it is usually off-limits to devotees on usual days.

Our next stop is the **Maha Sasanaramsi Burmese Buddhist Temple** located at the outskirts of Balestier. This is a uniquely designed temple with three roofs to allow more natural light to enter.

At the top floor of the temple, we had the chance to see the Buddha with his right palm facing outwards. This is the Abhaya mudra symbolizing fearlessness which resonated with the story of the Buddha stopping an intoxicated elephant charging at him with his loving-kindness.

Before we left for the next destination, we also learnt that the term “Sayadaw” is the Burmese form of “Thero” which is an honorific term for senior bhikkhus in the Theravada monastic order. In this portrait is Sayadaw U Pannya Vamsa.

Our last stop was at the **Amitabha Buddhist Centre** which is located in Geylang. We were hosted by Brother Tan Hup Cheng who has great knowledge of the Vajrayana tradition. Despite a small land parcel, one would be amazed how well organised this centre is.

It was interesting to learn how blessings are manifested in mantras. Just by looking at all the Tibetan mantras carved on the top of the main doorway (in blue and red), one will be purified of the five heavy negative kammas and the ten non-virtues.

An interesting focus to note in the animal artefacts is the Garuḷā. One can see that it has a serpent in its beak which symbolizes the spiritual energy of devouring delusions of jealousy and hatred represented by the Nāga. Lions, on the other hand, are the protectors of the Dhamma.

To the left of the entrance is a large prayer wheel which is equivalent to 156 billion "*Om Mani Padme Hum*" and each revolution is as meritorious as reading the inscription as many times as it is written on the scroll. This in turn leads to the purification of negative karma.

At the main shrine, one can see the statue of Chenrezig. We can see from here that he has a thousand hands and eleven heads. It was shared that one of the heads was added by the Amitabha Buddha with his blessing of higher wisdom and another was added by Bodhisattva Vajrapani symbolizing the special powers of all the Buddhas.

Towards the end, we learnt that ABC practises the Gelug tradition of Tibetan buddhism, which is founded by Lama Tsongkhapa, and focuses on the Vinaya codes. Finally, we ended our tour with a group photo in the main shrine.

After returning to Mangala Vihara, Bhante Suneetha gave us a short debrief, wishing us all the very best in our learning journey in academic Buddhism. He ended the debrief by leading us through a puja and a round of blessings for all of us.

The team which answered all questions correctly had the opportunity to win a small prize from Bhante Suneetha who also wished us the very best for our examination next year.

In conclusion, we learnt a lot about the various interpretations and manifestations of the Dhamma within the Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions. We also had the opportunity to explore the Burmese depiction of Theravada Buddhism in Singapore. We are grateful for this opportunity and for the new spiritual friendships forged. May all be well and happy!

The Incredible India Pilgrimage

15 – 26 Dec 2023

There are three parts to this article:

1. Travel Log - By Sis Tyy Yn and Bro Bryan
2. Dhamma Talks during the Pilgrimage - By Sis Tyy Yn with inputs from Bhante Cakkapala and Bhante Suneetha
3. Reflection on the Pilgrimage – By Bro KIT

Quick info on the tour group: The 35 members comprised:

- 3 Bhantes: Bhante Cakkapala, Bhante Sirisumana, and Bhante Suneetha
- 31 alumni members and existing students of BPC and their family members/friends, including Bro Jebsons Chia, Chairman, BPC Alumni Committee and 2 Committee members
- Singapore tour leader, Sis Judith Toh of Ik Chin Travel.

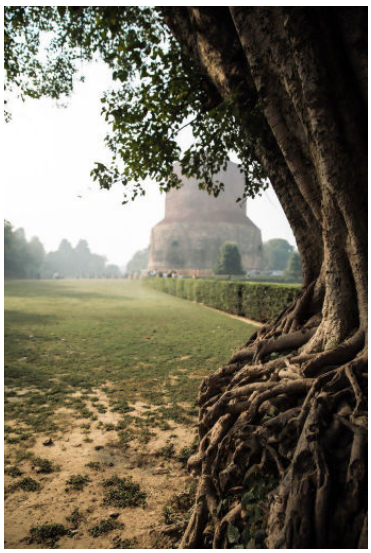
The Incredible India Pilgrimage

- Part I: Travel Log

We were looking forward to this India Pilgrimage, organised by the Buddhist and Pāli College of Singapore (BPC) Alunmni Committee. It signalled the end of our examinations but most importantly, we learnt that:

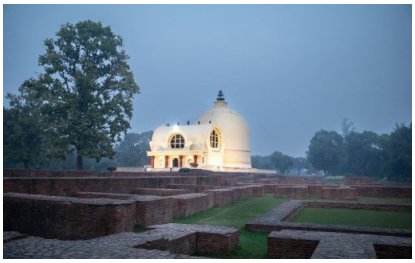
> In *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta (DN16)*, the Buddha mentioned that four inspiring places should be seen by one endowed with faith – the place the *Tathāgata* was born, attained Enlightenment, set in motion the Wheel of the Dhamma and attained *Mahāparinibbāṇa*.

Attained Enlightenment: Bodh Gaya



First Discourse: Sarnath

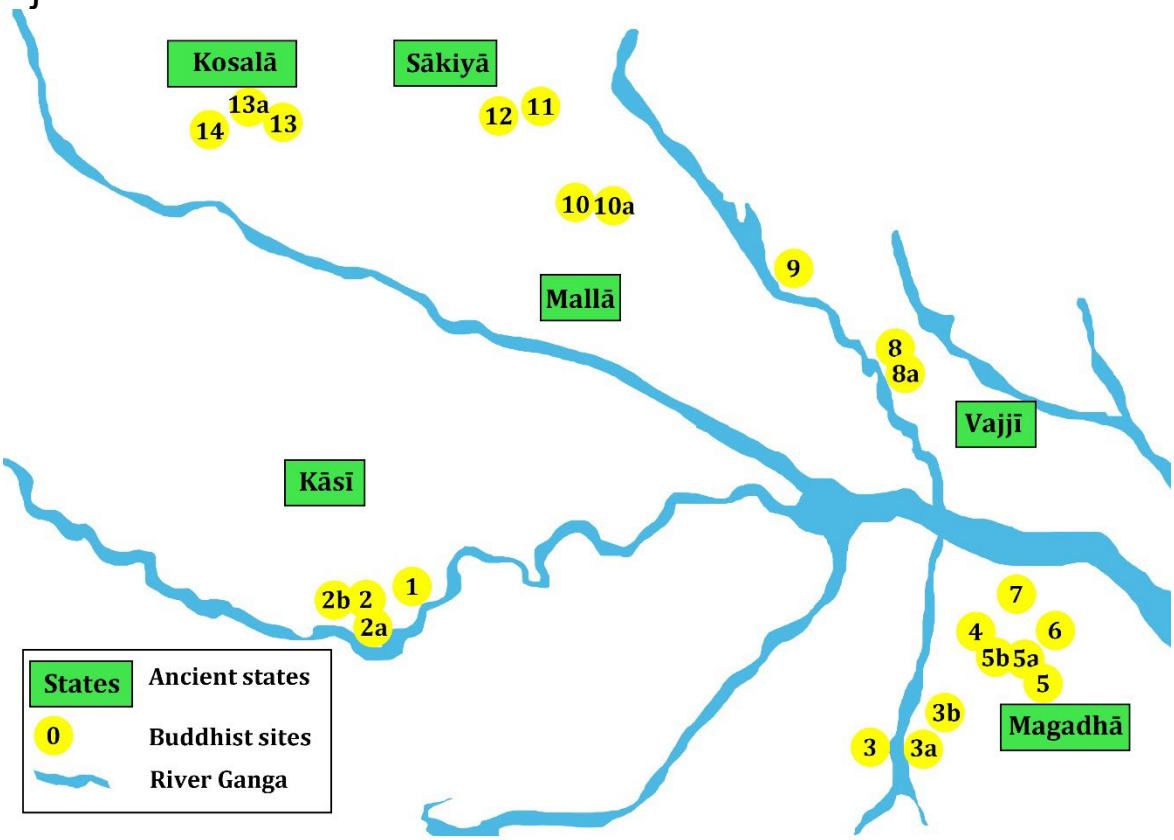
Birthplace: Lumbini



***Mahāparinibbāṇa*: Kushinagar**

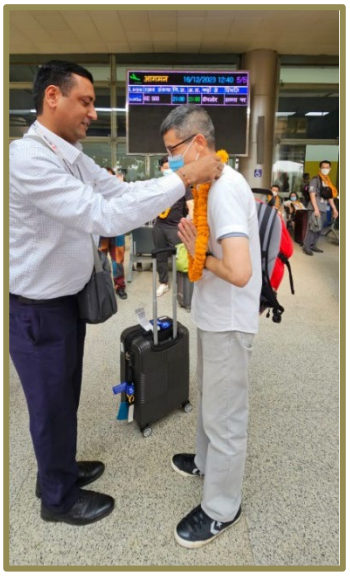
Photo credits: Bhante Suneetha

Besides the four main sites, our trip also brought us to numerous important Buddhist sites and temples. The map below is based on the ancient map of the Mahajanapadas dated before the expansion and occupation of King Ajātasatu.



1		River Ganga, Varanasi	16 Dec, Day 2
2		Dhamekh Stupa, Sarnath, Varanasi	17 Dec, Day 3
	a	Chaukhandi Stupa, Sarnath, Varanasi	17 Dec, Day 3
	b	Dharmarajika Stupa, Sarnath, Varanasi	17 Dec, Day 3
3		Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya	18 Dec, Day 4
	a	Sujata Stupa/Temple	18 Dec, Day 4
	b	Prakh Bodhi Cave	18 Dec, Day 4
4		Sattappani/Saptaparni Cave (Rajgir/Rājagaha)	19 Dec, Day 5
5		Bimbimsara Jail	20 Dec, Day 6
	a	Maniyar Math	20 Dec, Day 6
	b	Sone Bhandar Caves	20 Dec, Day 6
6		Vultures peak, Gridhakuta Hill (Rājagaha)	20 Dec, Day 6
7		Nālandā (Rājagaha)	20 Dec, Day 6
8		Ananda Stupa, Vesālī	21 Dec, Day 7
	a	Buddha Relic Stupa, Vesālī	21 Dec, Day 7
9		Kesariya Stupa	22 Dec, Day 8
10		Mahaparinirvana Temple, Kusinārā	22 Dec, Day 8
	a	Ramabhar stupa	22 Dec, Day 8
11		Lumbinī	23 Dec, Day 9
12		Piprahwa Stupa, Kapilavatthu	24 Dec, Day 10
13		Anāthapiṇḍika Stupa	24 Dec, Day 10
	a	Aṅgulimāla Stupa (Sravasti)	24 Dec, Day 10
14		Jetavana Monastery (Sravasti)	24 Dec, Day 10

15 & 16 Dec (Day 1 & 2): Setting off to India and at River Ganga



The trip started well with a special group check-in at the Singapore Changi Airport and Delhi Airport. With a large group of 35 members, these arrangements not only expedited our check-in, they also enabled many of us to get to know one another, share the courses that we took in BPC/Mangala Vihara, and encourage one another to continue the Dhamma journey. At the airport in Varanasi, we were welcomed with garlands of flowers by our local tour guide, Mr Rahul.

Our first evening in India was at the **Ganga River**. I heard stories about the derelict state of the River and the muddy path that we would need to step through to take the River cruise. To my pleasant surprise, the place we were brought to was well-paved. We boarded the cruise with ease amidst occasional stops to unentangle ourselves from the strings originally tied to kites left around the area.

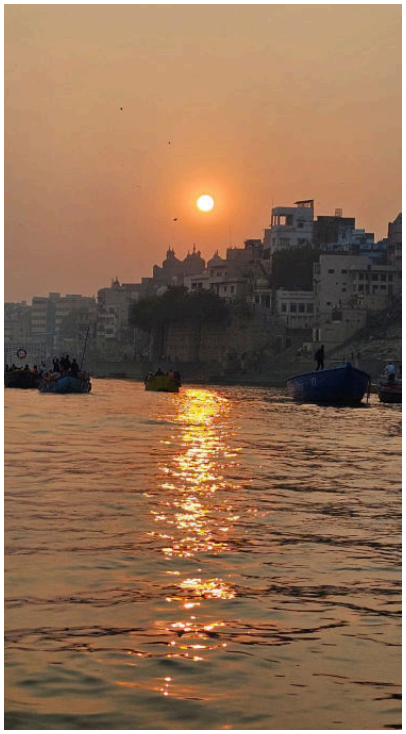
During the cruise, we saw some people taking a dip in the River, dipping/cleansing the corpses in the River and their cremations, as well as shaving the hair of male family members at the River bank, done in the hope that their sins would be cleansed, the deceased could be reunited with the Brahma and there would be no further misfortune in the family, respectively.

Dipping/cleansing the corpses

Cremation ground

Following the Hindu tradition, we lit the candles prepared for us and left our trail at the Ganga River.

Photo credits: Bro Kok Eng, Bro Kit and Sis Tyy Yn



Reflection:

In the Pāli canon, there were also many mentions of the River Ganga (River Ganges), such as:

> "Just as the River Ganges inclines towards the sea, slopes towards the sea, tends towards the sea, merges into the sea, so too Master Gotama's assembly with its householders and those gone forth inclines towards *Nibbāna*, slopes towards *Nibbāna*, tends towards *Nibbāna*, merges into *Nibbāna*."
>
> *Mahāvaccha Sutta (MN73)*

17 Dec 2023 (Day 3) – Dhamekh Stupa, Archaeological Museum and Chaukhandi Stupa, Sarnath, Varanasi

We officially started our pilgrimage with a visit to **Dhamekh Stupa**, which marked the place where the Buddha delivered his First Discourse, *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN56.11)*, after he attained Enlightenment. Read on to find out our group's very own First Dhamma Talk delivered by Bhante Cakkapala at the Dhamma Talk segment. Besides the Dhamekh stupa, we also visited the places that were said to be his meditation spot and dwelling place in the same compound. There were also remains of an Asoka pillar whose capital was kept at the Archaeological Museum which we would be visiting in the afternoon as well as a deer park adjacent to the site but fenced up.

Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Bhante offering light on behalf of the group

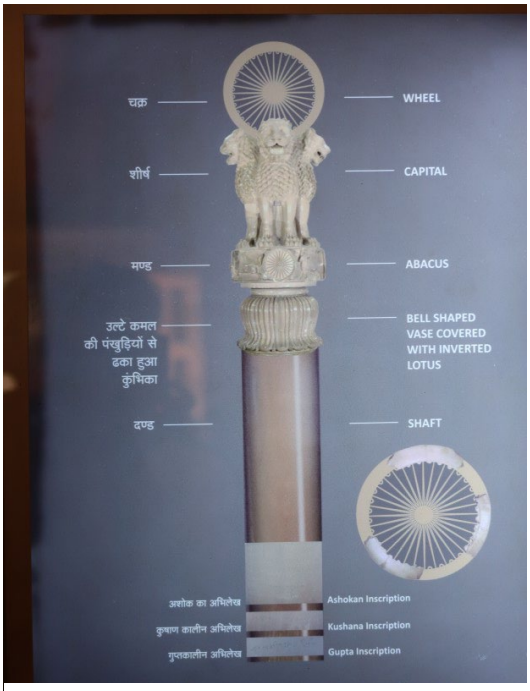
Mulagandha Kuti: Once a huge temple of 61m in height. The Buddha was said to meditate here.

Dharmarajika Stupa
One of the 84,000 stupas built by King Asoka to house the re-distributed Buddha's relics.

Dwelling place of the Buddha

After lunch, we visited the **Archaeological Museum, Sarnath**. It is the oldest archaeological museum in India – home to many Buddhist and Hindu artifacts recovered in Sarnath. Although we were excited, many of us frowned at the regulations which only allowed cameras to be brought in (but not handphones). Thanks to our group members, here are some awe-inspiring photos, especially the capital of the Asoka pillar remnants that we saw at the Dhamekh Stupa.

Buddha Statue in Dharmachakra Mudra
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha



Conjectural View of Lion Capita with Pillar and Chakra
Photo credit: Bro KIT

Wheel of the Asoka Pillar
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Capital of the Asoka Pillar
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Our last stop for the day was the **Chaukhandi Stupa**, said to mark the site where the Buddha met his five ascetic friends after attaining Enlightenment.

This was followed by a long drive to Bodh Gaya where we had a late dinner. Most of us went to bed right after, not just due to the long day, but also to refresh ourselves to visit the much-awaited Mahabodhi Temple early the next morning.

18 Dec 2023 (Day 4) – Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya

By Bro Bryan

We had requested to start our visit to **Mahabodhi Temple** early at 5am as we heard how crowded the place would usually be and would be more so since Dalai Lama was in Town during this period.

It was still dark but many people were already walking in the same direction as us - all towards the Temple. Handphones were not allowed but fortunately, a few of us brought digital cameras which could be brought in with a fee for the day. Queues started forming at the gate and there were two security checks. After we went in, I was able to see the front of the temple which was a sight to behold.

Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

The sun was rising and we saw monks of all traditions, lay devotees and tourists everywhere. People were chanting, praying, queuing, circumambulating, meditating, etc. It became extremely crowded very quickly.

Sis Judith found a place for us to meditate beside the Bodhi Tree, a sampling taken from the original Bodhi Tree that the Buddha gained Enlightenment under.

Bodhi Tree, Mahabodhi Temple
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

We were then led to a tent-like area where Bhante Suneetha led us in chanting and Bhante Cakkapala gave a Dhamma Talk.

Chanting and Dhamma Talk
Photo credit: Bro KIT

Mahabodhi Temple
Photos credit:
Bhante Suneetha

After that, we went to offer robes and flowers to the Buddha image inside the Temple. The Buddha image looked very serene and peaceful. I felt a sense of joy and gratitude that finally I arrived at the very place where the Buddha attained Enlightenment!

Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

We also circumambulated the Temple and Bodhi Tree. Looking beyond the fence surrounding the Bodhi Tree, one could see the Diamond throne erected by King Asoka to mark the exact position where the Buddha sat.

We went back to the hotel for breakfast and came back again to the Mahabodhi Temple compound, visiting the places where the Buddha was said to have spent each of the next seven weeks after his Enlightenment, besides the first week under the Bodhi Tree. Two examples are shown below:

Photo credit: Bro KIT

The spot that marked the place where the Buddha remained gazing unblinkingly at the Bodhi Tree.

Photo credit: Bro KIT

The chamber where he meditated with his mind and body so purified that six coloured rays were emitted from his body — blue, yellow, red, white, orange and a mixture of these five, which formed the colours of the Buddhist flags.

Photo credit: Bro Bryan

After lunch, we set off to visit **Prag Bodhi Cave** (literally meaning “prior to Enlightenment”) where the Buddha and the 5 ascetics were said to practise self-mortification.

SUJATA TEMPLE
This is the ancient place, Where Sujata of Village Senani (BAKROUR) had offered milk-rice to Siddhartha here Under Banyan tree

Photo credit: Bro Bryan

We also visited **Sujata Temple,** the place where the maiden, Sujata, was said to offer milk rice to Sidhartha Bodhisatta just after he decided to abandon the self-mortification practice.

Photo credit: Bro KIT

There was also a **Sujata Garh,** a stupa to commemorate the residence of Sujata.

In the evening, my sister and I decided to skip the dinner at the hotel to visit the **Mahabodhi Temple** at around 7pm. When we arrived at the gate, there was no queue and there were significantly fewer people.

Photo credit: Bro KIT

In the compound, the chants were softer than in the morning. We joined the dozen or so people who were meditating at a corner of the Bodhi Tree. I sat and meditated on the qualities of the Buddha, feeling extremely grateful and inspired. Sitting near the Tree and seeing the soft warm lights lighting the Tree, the area was breathtaking and gave me a sense of peace, serenity and calmness. After an hour of meditation, we went into the main shrine to pay our respects to the Buddha for the last time. We stayed inside the small hall and chanted along with the Thai monks for several minutes. We then circumambulated the Temple three more times before leaving it to dine at one of the restaurants along the street near our hotel. The meal was satisfying, and we were back in our hotel room at around 9pm. This was one of the most amazing nights ever.

19 Dec 2023 (Day 5) – Bodh Gaya / Sattappani Cave (Rājagaha/Rajgir)

The next morning, we visited **Mahabodhi Society of India, Buddhagaya Centre and the Jaya Srimahabodhi Vihara**, founded by a Sri Lankan Youth named Don David Hewavitarne, who became the Anagarika Dharmapala (The Homeless One). He championed the cause of Buddhism in India.

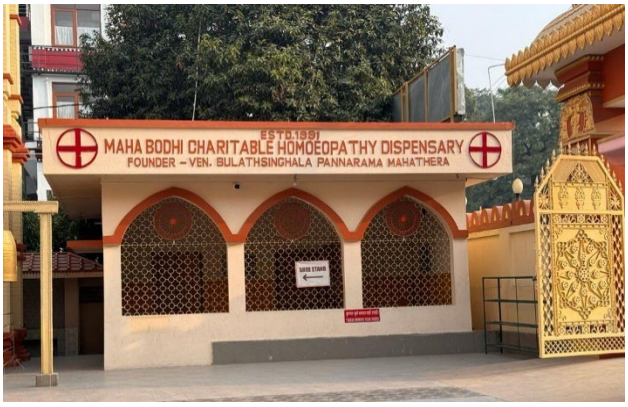


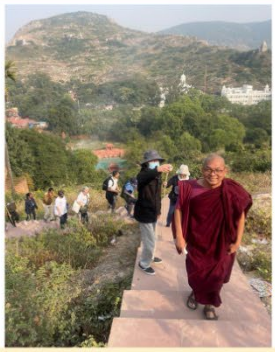
Photo credit: Bro Kok Eng

Upon learning that they are planning to operationalise a dispensary to look after the needy people by offering free treatment and medicine, many tour group members contributed to the worthy cause.

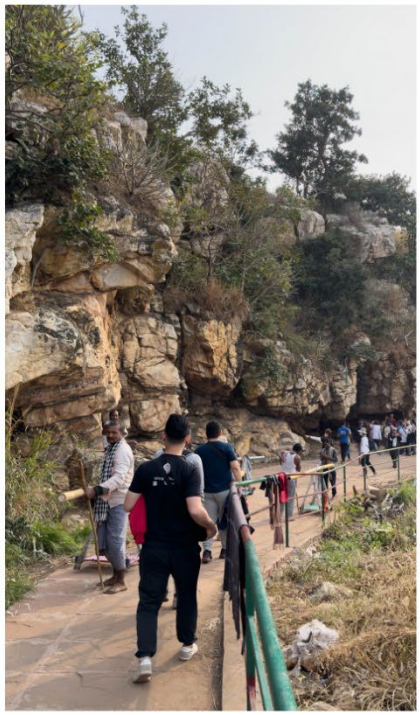
BPC Committee Members with Sis Jean

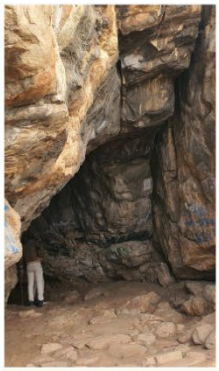
We then set off to Rajgir and visited **Daibutsu, the Great Buddha Statue**, en route. It was built 80 feet tall to mark the Buddha's *Mahāparinibbāna* at 80 years old.

After lunch, the tour group set off to visit **Sattapani Cave** – the place believed to be where the First Buddhist Council, sponsored by King Ajatasatu, was held to preserve the teachings of the Buddha. I stayed back at the hotel, together with two other group members, as we were not well enough to visit the Caves. We were kept updated on their journey and Bhante Cakkapala's Dhamma Talk.

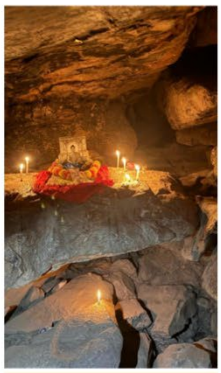


To reach the Sattappani Caves, take a leisure walk, use a walking stick or engage the Dolly Service.





Entrance to one of the caves



Inside the cave

Photo credits:
Sis Lee Kiow, Bro Stanly, Bro Kok Eng and Bro KIT

After dinner, some of us started our first shopping – at the hotel. I never imagined myself doing this, but it turned out to be one of the most fun shopping experiences I had and it was a leisure activity that many of us looked forward to for the rest of the trip. Read on to find out why.

20 Dec 2023 (Day 6) – Rājagaha/Rajgir

This was one of the most fruitful days of the tour. We first visited Bimbisara Jail (not in the original tour itinerary).

Bimbisara Jail: The place where Prince Ajatasatu imprisoned his father wishing that he would die soon for him to take over the throne, being instigated by Devadatta. It was specially built upon King Bimbisara's request so that he could see the Buddha at the nearby Vulture Peak daily.

Next, we climbed **Gridhakuta Hill**, also known as Vulture Peak. It was said that the Buddha delivered 4 important Mahayana Sutras here, comprising the Lotus Sutra, Perfection of Wisdom Sutra, Infinite Life Sutra and Agama Sutra. Read the Dhamma Talk segment to find out why this place is significant to Theravada Buddhism too.

Photo credits: Bro Kok Eng,
Sis Lee Kiow and Sis Yeow Khing

We also visited the Maniyar Math Site and Sone Bnarde (not in the original tour itinerary), where Bhante Cakkapala shared with us alternative views from scholars:

1. **Maniyar Math Site** (Architecture of Gupta period), with a cylindrical well-like structure associated with both Janism and Buddhism:

Janism: This well is covered by a small temple of the Jains, dedicated to Naga Salibhadra who is said to bury his treasure inside the well.

Buddhism: It is said that King Ajatasatu collected all the Buddha's relics to house at this site and protected it, awaiting a future King i.e. King Asoka who subsequently distributed them in 84,000 stupas.

2. **Sone Bhandar: The Actual Location of the First Buddhist Council?**

Sone Bhandar

Sattapanni Cave

Photo credit: Bro KIT

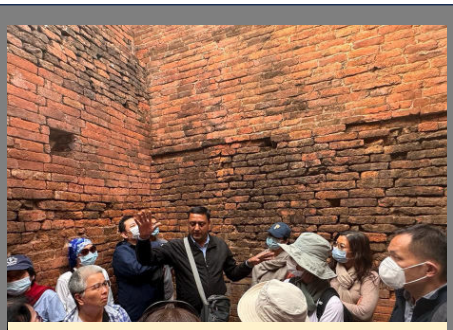
According to commentaries, the First Buddhist Council was held in front of Sattapanni Caves. However, there is an alternative view on the actual location of the Sattapanni Caves - **Sone Bhandar**. Sone Bhandar is situated at the base of a mountain and there is enough space in front of the caves to accommodate 500 Arahants and some devotees who were said to have attended the Council. Conversely, the current located Sattapanni Caves would be too high for more than 80 Mahātheras to ascend, which made it unlikely to the actual location for the First Buddhist Council.

We learnt that Sone Bhandar was also related to Jainism due to the carvings and inscriptions found in the caves. There might had been a dispute between Buddhists and Jains regarding the ownership of Sone Bhandar, with the Hindu governors possibly giving a new location of Sattapanni Cave for the Buddhists.

Incidentally, when our tour group was there, we met a group of Tibetan monks who also believed that this should be the site of the First Buddhist Council.

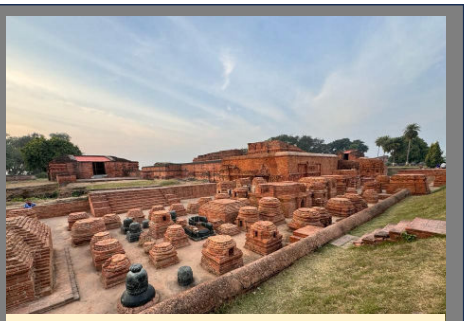
After lunch, we visited **Nalanda University**, one of the oldest universities of the World and International Centre for Buddhist Studies.

Corridor leading to accommodation



Where Ven Xuanzang was believed to have stayed

Sariputta Temple



Stupas to commemorate eminent teachers

Self-contained nunnery with cooking facilities and a well

Photo credits: Bro KIT, Bro Kok Eng and Sis Tyy Yn

Other Highlights of the Day

1. We literally became celebrities. There were many photo requests from the locals such as the following:

2. Fun-filled shopping experience. It was still early after dinner. Many continued the shopping exploration from last night at the hotel's gift shop. Besides being a repeat customer, some of us also became sales assistants - recommending suitable products to our fellow tourmates, helping them to choose the right colour, design and size, and even searched through the shelves to get them the item. Some also evaluated if they should start a little business, capitalising on the good rates offered. It was a night of fun and laughter! The icing on the cake came the next morning when all of us in the tour group received a gift of rosary. Hmm… we must have contributed beyond expectation to the little shop over the past two days!

The gift shop at The Residency, Rajgir sells shawls, blouses, Buddha images and other carvings like Asoka pillars as well as Himalaya products such as lip moisturizers and cold balms.

We delighted the boss so much that he gave each of us a rosary.

Photo credits: Sis LeeKiow and Sis Tyy Yn

21 Dec 2023 (Day 7) – Vaishali

It took about 4.5 hours from Rajgir to reach Vaishali. We visited the **Buddha Relic Stupa**, said to be the place where Licchavis' one-eighth share of the Buddha's relic was enshrined in then. The majority were believed to be removed by King Asoka and re-distributed to the 84,000 stupas he built, while the rest remained on-site and at the Patna Museum. At a stone's throw away, we saw an on-going government-funded construction which would be the new building to house these remaining relics as well as those kept at the Patna Museum.

Photo credit: Bro Kok Eng

We also visited the **Ananda Complex**, comprising an Ananda stupa and one Asoka pillar. It was estimated that there were 40 such pillars but around 20 remained today. The Complex was believed to either include a nunnery or the whole Complex was mainly a nunnery, as there would be a segregation of the accommodation of monks and nuns, and that the Ananda Stupa was built to commemorate the contributions of Ven Ananda in the establishment of the Bhikkhuni Order.

Ananda Stupa and Asoka Pillar
Photo credit: Bro KIT

Read the Dhamma Talk segment to find out more about the significance of Vaishali to the Buddha and Buddhism.

Remains of a Nunnery

On the way back to the coach, we saw classes of school children having lessons next to the road, amidst the farm goats and cows, and traffic passing by. As we walked past, the children from one of the classes recited their passages with vigour and lovely smiles. I watched with mixed feelings - their cheerfulness easily influenced me, yet I felt melancholy due to their sparse educational facility and the poverty we saw throughout this trip.

22 Dec 2023 (Day 8) – Vaishali/Kushinagar

Photo credit: Bhante Sirisumana

A lovely sight greeted us the next morning, looking out from the hotel window. It felt so peaceful and "heavenly". En route to Kushinagar, we stopped by **Kesariya Stupa**, believed to be originally built by King Asoka. It was also said that the stupa was built to commemorate the spot where the Buddha gave his alms bowl to the Bhikkhus who followed him from Vaishali after he announced his impending Mahāparinibbāṇa.

After lunch, we visited **Ramabhar Stupa**, Kushinagar *(Makutabandhana Chaitya).* This is the site where the Buddha was believed to be cremated and his relics were split into 8 portions by the Brahmin Dona. The Bhantes offered candles and flowers, and the group did a round of circumambulation around the stupa.

Photo credit: Bro Kok Eng

Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Our last stop for the day was the visit to the third sacred site, **Mahāparinibbāṇa Temple**, Kushinagar.

The group did a joint large robe offering mindfully to the Buddha and meditated in the temple. As we meditated, we noted that the surroundings also quieted down. Next, we found a spot in the garden to listen to Bhante Cakkapala's Dhamma Talk, immersed in the cool evening and lovely sunset. We also chanted a segment of the Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta.

Photo credits: Sis Judith and Sis Lay Tin

23 Dec 2023 (Day 9) – Lumbini, Nepal

We set off for the final sacred site, Lumbini, early the next morning. The leisure pace of the places in India that we visited thus far continued even at the two immigration offices. Wonder why there was a need for a 15-minute time difference though.

India Immigration

Nepal Immigration

While waiting patiently, some of us occupied ourselves by:

Taking the best photo
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Shopping or taking a rest
Photo credit: Bro Kok Eng

Buying these gigantic balloons to surprise the little ones back home.

It was mid-afternoon by the time we arrived at the **Lumbini Complex** which comprised the Sacred Garden, the monastic zone, the Cultural Centre and New Lumbini Village.

Thanks to the thoughtfulness and graciousness of Sis Judith who arranged Tutu to bring us to our destination as far as vehicles could go. We skipped the 1km walk and toured the Complex, in particular, the Sacred Garden earlier.

Photo credit: Bro Kok Eng

The **Sacred Garden** was designed by a Japanese architect, consisting of:

- **Mayadevi Temple**, with the Marker Stone marking the birthplace of Prince Siddartha and the Nativity Sculpture (no photos were allowed in the Temple)
- **Asoka Pillar**
- **Puskarini Sacred Pond**, believed to be where Queen Maya took the ritualistic bath before giving bath to Prince Siddhartha and the place where Prince Siddhartha had the first bath.

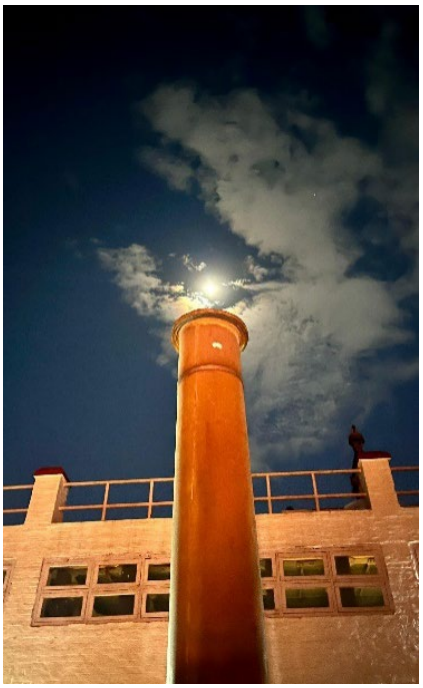
As we strolled around Lumbini Complex, we were mesmerised by the lovely sunset colouring the sky with different shades and a mixture of orange, yellow, purple and red, vastly different from the equally beautiful but bright and sunny scenery when we first arrived.

Mayadevi Temple, Lumbini
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha

Mayadevi Temple with Asoka Pillar

Puskarini Sacred Pond

Light of Faith
Photo credit: Bhante Suneetha



Rainbow atop Asoka Pillar
Photo credit: Bhante Sirisumana

The night portrayed a different magic as seen from the photos on the left.

I felt a sense of gratitude to be able to complete the visit to the four inspiring places mentioned by the Buddha, considering that I had been under the weather even before the trip. Reflecting on this, feelings of tranquillity and bliss arose in me. It did not matter whether the monuments were built at the exact spots associated with those events of the Buddha. It was sufficient to be near where the Buddha once walked.

24 Dec 2023 (Day 10) – Sravasti

The next day, we left early to Sravasti, crossing the Nepal-India border again. Besides taking more photos and shopping, some were entertained by the interactions between a tour member and a dog while I marvelled at the enterprising nature of the locals in the sale of the common Chai tea.

Perfect story for the creation of yet another chapter of our very own “Jakata” stories.

Mobile Chai Tea, served fresh and hot.

After clearing the customs, we visited **Kapilavastu**, Sravasti, the capital of the Shakyan Kingdom. **Piprawah Stupa** was erected to enshrine the share of the Buddha’s relics received by the Shakyans. Excavations at the site revealed relic caskets with Brahmin inscriptions describing the erection of the stupa for this purpose.

After a late lunch, we visited **Anathapindika's Stupa or Kachchi Kuti** and **Angulimana Stupa**.

Anathapindika's Stupa or Kachchi Kuti

Angulimana Stupa

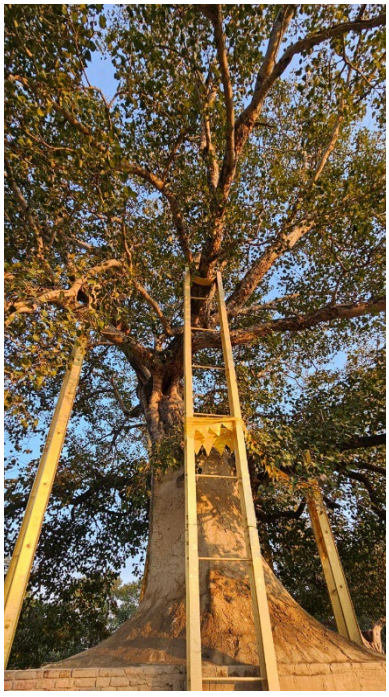
The final stop of the day, and the pilgrimage, was **Jetavana Vihara**, the place where the Buddha spent 25 rainy retreats at.

Gandha Kuti

Bhante Cakkapala gave us a Dhamma talk at the Gandha Kuti, where the Buddha was believed to reside when he was at Jetavana, and Bhante Suneetha led in the chanting of *Maṅgala Sutta.*

As we strolled around the garden, we were introduced to the various sites believed to be the residences of the Buddha's prominent disciples, the place where the Buddha had his walking meditations, a nunnery, the residence of travelling monks etc.

Ghandha Kuti



Of these, we were attracted to the **Bodhi Tree**, symbolic of Anathapindika's request to the Buddha - to have an object of reverence for people to pay homage to when the Buddha was not in the Jetavana monastery. The Bodhi Tree looked exceptionally radiant with the sunset as its backdrop.

Photo credit: Bro KIT

The last 1.5 days were spent travelling back home.

Thank you for staying on this travel log till this point. We hope it gives you a good glimpse of the meaningful yet fun pilgrimage we had. We would like to invite you to continue reading the other two portions: Dhamma Talks and a reflection on this pilgrimage in a special India Pilgrimage Edition by March 2024. At this junction, we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to every tour group member especially the following:

- Bhante Cakkapala for the Dhamma Talks, selection of chants at various locations and for facilitating the visits to other important Buddhist sites
- Bhante Sirisumana for looking after the safety of the group and sharing the Dhamma
- Bhante Suneetha for compiling the chants, leading the recitation melodiously, sharing the Dhamma and his artistic photos
- Sis Judith for a smooth trip, addressing our multitude of requests, and helping us with all our trip administration including filling up the arrival forms
- Bro Kok Eng for his daily travel log via the group chat
- Bro KIT for sharing his photos and “Jakata Tales”
- Bro Yeh Geng for taking on the *kapiya* duties, and to Bro KIT and Bro Chin Ching for volunteering as assistant *kapiyas*
- All group members for being great *Kalyāṇa-mittatā* that made this trip such an enjoyable and meaningful one for all of us.

In conclusion, this pilgrimage is an excellent milestone at the end of our Masters programme as we could relate what we have learnt to most of what we saw. Having many of our classmates and college-mates with us added to this learning and more importantly, enhanced our bonding to continue the path of our spiritual development. We are already looking forward to the next pilgrimage to Sri Lanka!

Upcoming Activity

Lunar New Year Bonding

Sunday
4 pm to 5.30 pm

food
games
fun

18 February
2024

Mangala Hall (ie the dining hall)
@ Mangala Vihara
See you there!

Organised by BPCA Committee

Upcoming Activity

BE PART OF THE MINDFULNESS WALK ACTIVE GROUP
(open only to current teachers and students of BPC for now)
MINDFULNESS WALK EVENT
Walk along with Bhantes, from Mangala Vihara to East Coast Park and back through park connector network, observing "Noble Silence"
25 FEB 2024 | 5.20 PM - 8 PM
Journey starts and ends at Mangala Vihara
Register here!
Proudly organised by BPCA Committee

Current School Activities	**Buddhist and Pali College Courses** • 2023/2024 Diploma in Buddhism (English) • 2024 Diploma in Buddhism (Chinese) • Bachelor of Arts in Buddhist Studies
Upcoming Activities	• 18 February 2024: Lunar New Year Bonding for current BPC teachers and students • 25 February 2024: Mindfulness Walk for current BPC teachers and students • 2 to 10 April 2024: Convocation cum Sri Lanka Tour (Only for BA and MA classes of 2023-2024)

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